

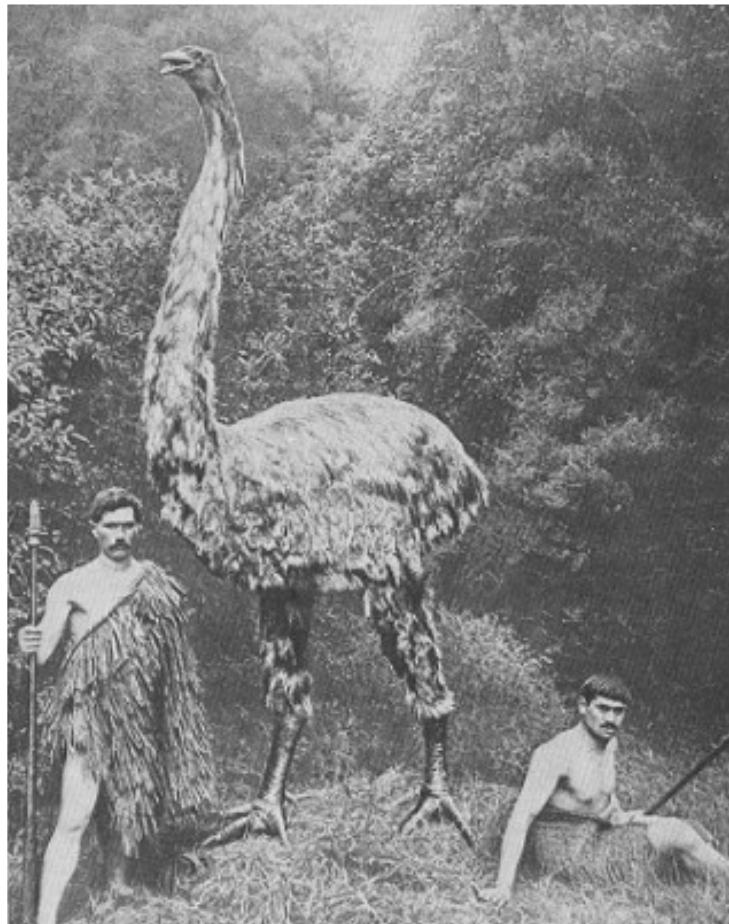
“Reflections on the Human Races”

by Doctor Antoine Foley

ANTHROPOLOGY SOCIETY OF PARIS

Meeting of April 15, 1880

Robert K. Stevenson – Translator and Editor



Giant moa bird of New Zealand and two Maoris

Reflections on the Human Races

Messieurs, the work that I have recently offered to the Anthropology Society has for its title: *le Dix-neuvième Siècle et sa Devise*; and for its epigraph this phrase was borrowed from the *Méditations* of Descartes:

“The mind is so strongly dependent on the constitution and disposition of the organs of the body that, if it is possible to find any way that produces men who are wiser and more able than they have been up to now, it is in medicine that one should look.”

From this epigraph and the title of my book, if you have already drawn the conclusion that it is devoted in very large part to politics, you have not deceived yourselves. And you will deceive yourselves even less if you add that I have striven to show that the foundation of the art of governing is the science of man and the societies that he organizes; because, among other questions that I have tried to answer in the affirmative, this one is met with:

“The natural sciences (as well as anthropology and sociology most particularly), which people are beginning to regard as exact, are they already sufficiently developed and practical so that it is possible with their principles to guide individual, domestic, professional, civil, political and also religious existence?”

Now, I shall not discuss here either the first or the last part of my book, both of which, I repeat, deal with politics. But, the middle part, does it also deal with politics? Most certainly not, because it enters into the object of your studies, messieurs, treating:

- 1) Man, moral as well as physical;
- 2) The formation of the different races;
- 3) Societies (large or small) that are at first entirely organized empirically, but afterwards are organized more and more systematically, and finally
- 4) Social categories, in these societies taking shape, that outline and define themselves for the short amount of time that they exist—for example, for the few days that the central Australian aborigine employs to find and impregnate his temporary wife.

Here now, in the order that I have presented them, are the subjects and anthropological and sociological problems that I have endeavored to resolve, or

at the very least to put into an equation, in the middle part of my book:

I

Reflections on man, regarded as a threefold organism, whose life, movement, and thought are only functional resultants.

In arriving at this opinion, which still has many opponents, I am supported by the following propositions and facts:

Just as there is only one astronomy and one physics, there is only one organic chemistry.

The living being, such that he is, is influenced and impressed by a world that always changes, and in this world (which always changes) the living being is governed by a nervous system, just as much impressionable as it is able to produce an impression, which also will always change.

II

Memory, the conscience, prejudice, originality, madness and genius (more and more social products) are only the resultants of manners of being and functioning that our encephalic nervous elements adopt by dint of their being impressed the same way, sometimes by our own organism; sometimes only by the moral milieu that surrounds us; sometimes also by the material environment in whose midst we live; but, most often, by the preceding all together.

Resolve, a threefold resultant of our being active, emotional, and intellectual, is nearly, if not entirely, nonexistent in the savage.

The ordinary civilized person borrows enormously from custom, the latest fashion, and prejudice.

The fool, like the man of genius, is the result of an almost exclusively original effort, generally excessive work that, with the former, is based on an error, with the latter, based on a truth.

III

General reflections on the black, colored, and white races, viewed as the three great resultants (totally savage at first, but then becoming civilized little

by little) that the three main climates of our terrestrial globe have brought about in our species.

In order to treat this question of the races, I have drawn inspiration from the following propositions:

Our organism (like each of its organs, tissues, and constituent elements) is completely variable within certain anatomical-physiological limits.

In 24 hours we are only able to make a certain quantity of blood and tissue, so that if too much is consumed now, too little will be able to be consumed later.

It is by forging that one becomes forged; or, to put it another way, the organ that one uses develops itself, while the organ that one misuses (be it more or less) atrophies.

Finally, it is only by taking stock of the physico-chemical, mechanical and aesthetical-sensory modifications of our environment, as well as the indispensable modifications of our products, productive organs, and nervous centers (which govern us), that one can account for the aspects and forms that the human body presents.

IV

Reflections on the three vital modes or, if you prefer, on the three particular ways of being, acting and thinking, that our three sorts of great races or human variants have respectively entered upon in forming themselves in both the Old and New World.

These three vital modes, as we shall see later on, are copied respectively by the vital mode of the infant, adult, and man of mature age.

V

Specific reflections on the black races of the Old World as well as the New World.

These races merit, I contend, the surname *vegetative-sentimentals*:

Because they comprise the specimens of what man becomes to the physical as well as to the moral;

When, as much as anatomico-physiological limits permit him, he has sacrificed (from father to son, from generation to generation, and from century to century) his mechanical aptitudes of the animal (more or less energetic) and his mental faculties of thinking (more or less intelligent) to the development and to the maximum power of his visceral and instinctive organs;

When, as I said, he had made this double sacrifice; because, among the obstacles of all sorts that fetter his existence and that of his race, those that surpass all the others pose to him problems in this fundamental order:

Firstly, by virtue of the deplorable qualities of the agents (physico-chemical) and aliments (solids, liquids and gaseous) that his environment offers to his digestive, respiratory, perspiratory and other organs, in order to maintain his plasticity;

Secondly, by virtue of the mechanical impulses, also deplorable, that this same environment offers to his ambulatory, prehensory, abducent, adducent and related organs, in order to provide for his motility; and

Thirdly, by virtue of the likewise deplorable ways of living, phenomena or aesthetic spectacles (auditory, optical, olfactory, sapid or appreciably tactile) that this same environment presents to his sensori-exploratory organs, in order to feed his mentality.

Speaking thusly, I then make particular allusion to the Negroes and Papuans, who live in 1) the torrid zone, 2) inordinately dry areas (such as certain deserts of Africa, Asia, and Australia), or 3) excessively humid localities (such as certain shorelands, riverbanks, deltas, or low-lying islands of Africa, Asia, and Australia).

Localities where the aforementioned vital problems confront the human organism are as follows:

First problem. – How man . . . absolutely naked in the sun, in a perfectly dry country, where a thermometer placed on the ground can go up to 70 degrees Celsius (and even 84 degrees, if one coats his container with lampblack) . . . will it not specially prepare his skin, glandular organs, hair, coloring and so on, in which he depends, in order that he does not die in isolation?

Second problem. – How man . . . only obtains, for arterializing his blood, air as rarefied as it is warm and irritating for his pulmonary mucous . . . will it not uniquely dispose his respiratory, circulatory, and above all his perspiratory organs so that he does not die from asphyxiation?

Third problem. – How man . . . immersed in an exceedingly marshy atmosphere, or having only completely putrid and febriferous water to drink . . . will these conditions make his intestinal and depurative organs such that he is not more unhealthy than the mammals, birds, hippopotamuses, reptiles, ibises, and crocodiles which surround him, and able as well, like these animals, to absorb febriferous elements through the skin and the pulmonary and gastrointestinal mucous?

Fourth problem. – How man . . . not having on occasion the possibility of eating for five, six, seven, eight or nine whole days . . . will it not dispose the walls of his abdomen, plus his entire digestive apparatus, as well as his reserves of adipose cells to be such that they allow him to ingurgitate, digest, absorb and, little by little, reabsorb that which he must of solid, liquid, and gaseous elements in order to live five, six, seven, eight, or even nine days?

I have cited only four problems belonging to the vegetative-biological category that are posed to the black by his environment, and resolved by his organism. I could cite many more, without counting all those falling under the mechanico-muscular and sensori-aesthetic categories.

VI

I consider next in my book the colored races (of the Old World as well as the New World), and I state that they merit the surnames *musculo-voluntaries* or *practical-actives* of our species; because they comprise the specimens of what man is (to the moral as well as to the physical) when he seems to have developed, as much as it can be done, his bodily machine to move vigorously and the nervous system that governs it, to the detriment of his visceral and sensory organs as well as to the detriment of the nervous systems that likewise govern them. Or, if you please, I say of the colored races that they merit the aforementioned surnames because they comprise the specimens of a man who appears to have exaggerated all the organs that most particularly govern his nerves, ganglions and plexuses of spinal origin, his spinal marrow, his pericerebellar crown and (perhaps also) the middle peripheral region of his brain—the peripheral region where (probably) our aesthetic images form themselves. These exaggerations, I continue, manifest

themselves in the colored man because of all the obstacles that he has to surmount in order to live, the most preponderant are of a mechanical nature and, hence, exact as much force and address of his muscles as they do of the tenacity of his character.

Speaking in this manner, I then make allusion on the one hand to the quite vast spaces (nautical or indeed terrestrial) and monsters (plant or animal) that the two Americas have set in opposition to their native redskins up to now; and, on the other hand, to the spaces and monsters, no less considerable, that Asia and Malaysia have likewise put in opposition up to now to, in the former's case, its colored and yellow-skinned people and, in the latter's case, to its colored and olive-skinned people.

Persons of red, yellow, or greenish skin who . . . contrary to what has been sustained for a long time and is still sustained by many black-skinned people, be they in Africa, Australia, or elsewhere . . . have never admitted and, less than ever, do not acknowledge that supremacy over the soil belongs, even during the night, to any other species but their own.

It is in reflecting on the moral and muscular energy of the American Indians, Asians, and Malays (hunters, fishermen, or shepherds) that I have come to speak of red, yellow, and olive-skinned people as not allowing co-proprietors in the localities that they frequent.

Well, messieurs, if I must muse about and cite the human varieties that do not admit to equals in guile or in material dexterity, I would talk to you about (in regard to the first of these qualities) certain Chinese who are almost white, having skin and lungs that willingly work and act like our people's; and (regarding the second quality) I would discuss certain Indians and Malays whose skin (respectively red and sufficiently dark green) functions, respectively, like that of the blacks inhabiting the very dry countries, and like that of the blacks inhabiting the very humid countries.

VII

The white races of our species I reflect upon next.

These races, I maintain, merit the surname *human mental variants*;

Because they comprise the specimens of what man is to the physical as well as to the moral;

When his entire vegetative system and entire animal system have, as much as possible, been sacrificed up to the smallest details to the perfectionment of all the organs, tissues, elements, humours, nerves, plexuses and ganglions that serve him to aesthetically explore the world; and, at the same time, to the maximum development of the cortico-cerebral surface that serves him likewise to render judgment.

Speaking thusly, I then allude on the one hand to the whites of the New World, that is to say, to the Polynesians, Hawaiians as well as the Maoris; and, on the other hand, to the whites of the Old World, that is to say, to the Europeans;

Given that one ought to admit that Polynesia and Europe are the only regions on Earth where it is that white people are produced.

VIII

I next talk at length about the whites of the New World—specifically, the Polynesians: whites who have most especially put their intelligence to the service of the sentimental encephalic activity.

In order to well understand the nature of the problem which has (more than any other) preoccupied the genre of mankind, it is important to know something about Polynesia and its resources.

Therefore, messieurs, allow me a few words along these lines.

— In all of Polynesia the climate is always so favorable to man (when it is not truly delightful) and the soil so prolific in fruit and vegetables only (when it is not, in fact, too prodigious) . . . that the physico-chemical agents, plus the solid, liquid, and gaseous nutriments, as well as the mechanical impulses, which our organism needs for living and acting, are not lacking to him.

Hence, from the vegetative point of view as well as from the animal (that is, the physical) point of view, the Polynesian cannot have any serious apprehension.

Consequently, he is perfectly free to devote himself to the mental life, perfecting his intelligence in giving employment to the solution of social and moral problems.

Now, these social and moral problems always pose themselves before him, and moreover pose themselves in a totally special way. Here is how.

In Polynesia one only finds in the form of meat or, what is all the same, edible animals:

Firstly, as mammals, very rare wild dogs which only exist in Polynesia or New Zealand;

Secondly, as penniforms, rare birds of short or moderate height (save the *apteryx* and the *moa*, New Zealand species that have either nearly or totally disappeared), of which the best or least fowl are migrators;

Thirdly, as squamoid crawlers, being so tiny that one would certainly not gather them if the religion of taboos did not formally recommend to utilize them as condiments;

Fourthly, as squamoid swimmers, fish few in number, despite the immensity of the Pacific Ocean—fish so dangerous in certain waters and in certain seasons that it is sometimes necessary for the fisherman to reject nineteen twentieths of his catch in order to not be poisoned;

Fifthly, as Articulata, creatures that are as difficult for the natives to fish for as they are to dispatch;

Sixthly and finally, as mollusks, a certain number of shellfish that are as difficult to break open (when one has to swallow them raw) as they are painful to digest, when it is necessary to eat them cooked.

Now, what is this man? if not an omnivore, eminently sociable, very much more a devotee of meat than of fruit or vegetables . . . a being whose brain develops itself so much the more than the animal that it governs, and who is (to judge by our own European, mainly Western World, alimentary mode) provided with a richer and more easily assimilable nourishment, in other words, more carnal and better seasoned.

Therefore, in Polynesia the representatives of our species (not having anything better to do than to develop themselves mentally and to perfect their sensori-intellectual machine; and you see, in a few, how their climate allures them!) find themselves at all times in the presence of a very difficult problem, which is:

Being a human being who is ever a devotee of meat and whose society is constantly organizing itself more and more perfectly, that is to say, as a collectivity sparing more and more the life of the man and his body . . .; this aforementioned man (with his aforementioned body) becomes the sole game of real value others can consume in order to satisfy, I repeat, the appetites of omnivores that a growing civilization renders more and more carnivorous.

— This problem, much more important from the spiritual point of view than from the material point of view . . . because, with what they have to eat, it is not at all the quantity that is troubling, but rather the taste, the lack of nitrogen . . . how has the intelligence of the Polynesians tried to resolve this problem, first materially, and then morally?

Materially, that is to say, formatively and culinarily, the intelligence of the Polynesians has resolved it:

Firstly, by inventing and adding to their cooked food and stew certain mayonnaise sauces (made with lemon juice, small red pimento, sea-water, and crushed coconut), like the ones that people on Tahiti eat;

Secondly, by likewise inventing certain alimentary preserves (butyrically or caseically fermented), such as their poi;

Thirdly, by inventing certain animal condiments, such as their smoked eel, lizards, small pressed fish, etc.;

Fourthly and finally, by also inventing certain alcohols, such as kava (a kind of beer, ptyalogically fermented, that is unable to be preserved even for an hour) and brandy made from oranges.

— This then, messieurs, is how formatively and culinarily the Polynesians resolve the problem, half gastronomic and half social, that their land poses them.

Now, morally this problem (from this perspective, half of which is addressed by the Polynesians' political institutions and half by their religious regulations . . . half by the fruits of their practical experience and half by the fictions created by their intelligence, naively speculating on the appearances of the world and the sensations of their own organism without any sort of scientific accuracy), half gastronomic and half social, how have they resolved it?

The Polynesians have resolved this very same social problem: firstly, from a political point of view, by going through the five primary phases of warlike civilization . . . cannibalism, saturnism, anthropophagy, brigandage and then finally slavery . . . without being able, however, to perfect the latter two;

And morally, in the next place, by firstly creating the fine and noble civilization of taboos, which still so worthily directs the Tongans, who I observed in 1845; and secondly, by composing their genesis, which some day soon I shall read to you, as well as their legends, poems, and songs, some of which I shall also acquaint you with.

Now, I mean by *cannibalism*, this first phase of warlike civilization, during which man still remains so much a savage, that he does not hesitate (if such should be the case) to kill his own tribesman in order to eat.

By *saturnism*, this second phase of warlike civilization, I mean where (with the human pack becoming permanent) men only kill for eating purposes the most feeble and least useful of their group's members (the smallest of all the children, for example); and this is done only when it is an absolute necessity.

By *anthropophagy*, I mean this third phase of warlike civilization which prescribes in an absolute way the respect of the life of every other tribal companion no matter what, and no matter how small they may be, and only allows (in committing homicide for the aim of satisfying an irresistible carnivorous appetite) for the murder of an enemy or (what is all the same to this social age) a foreigner.

By *imperfect brigandage*, I mean this fourth phase of warlike civilization which (outlawing more than ever homicide against any member of the tribe) does not authorize the murder of a foreigner or enemy and (consequently) his mastication, except under self-defense.

Finally, by *slavery* (likewise *imperfect*), I mean this fifth phase of warlike civilization which . . . being less pure in the modern Polynesian world than in our old Greco-Roman antiquity . . . prohibits the murder of a defeated foreigner after combat, and also orders that he be kept as an instrument of work; but, it does, however, tolerate that he be killed whenever one has great social events to celebrate, such as a birth, marriage, the death of a chief, a peace pact, etc., etc.

In a forthcoming presentation to you, messieurs, I shall talk about the great white races of our Old World, and of the permanence and universality of the three great varieties of our species, or rather of its three main prototypes.